

FAMILY REALITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: POLICY OPTIONS AND DIRECTIONS

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There is only one sure basis of social reform and that is Truth - a careful detailed knowledge of the essential facts of each social problem. Without this there is no logical starting place for reform and uplift (DuBois and Dill).

Our role as policy educators is to help clientele find truth through identifying family policy issues, exploring policy options and examining consequences of the available options. Before we can do this effectively we must first perceive the new realities of our world.

In *The New Realities*, Peter Drucker says the next century is already here and we are well advanced into it. We may not see it because we are unable to step back and view objectively the paradigms around us. Today I challenge us to perceive Drucker's new realities. To move away from the confinement of seeing our world as we believe it to be and to take a holistic view of government, social policies and families with a special emphasis on rural families. We will use Drucker's new realities as our lens to examine one major issue facing families today—child care. Finally, we will consider policy options and consequences of the child care dilemma and our role as public policy educators.

Recognizing The New Realities

We live in a vastly different world today from the world of most of our childhoods. Profound changes since World War II have affected the family and are likely irreversible. Barring a worldwide disaster, Americans are likely to continue to have:

- increasing numbers of women in the paid labor force
- a dramatic rise in teen pregnancy
- divorce becoming as common as marriage
- increases in alcoholism, drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases
- increasing numbers of single-parent households
- lifetimes extending well beyond the child rearing years, often beyond 80
- effective means of contraception

- the spread of education throughout society and to both genders
- modern technologies for rapid travel and communication.

Drucker sees 1973 as the year that marked the end of the era in which government was the progressive cause. While the slogans of the welfare state century will be with us for a long time to come, the political doctrines have ceased to have much relevance politically, socially or economically.

Government's Changing Role

Government's role has also changed. We do not look upon government as the organ to produce a better society. There are limits to what government can do and what government money can buy. In some cases government spending has created more problems than it has solved. Low income housing and welfare are prime examples of government programs that encourage dependence and paralyze rather than energize. The "Great Society" proclaimed by Lyndon Baines Johnson is gone for good. Knowing their complexity, we have increasingly come to doubt there is one simple answer to any social problem.

Changing Economic Trends

In *Tales of a New America*, Reich explores the economic trends that are reshaping our society. The nation's economic vitality has suffered dramatically over the past thirty years. Reich reports that in 1960 the United States accounted for 35 percent of the world's economic output and was responsible for 22 percent of the world's exports. By 1980 the U.S. economic output had fallen to 22 percent and exports were down 11 percent. The two most significant changes in the American economy have been the shift from manufacturing to services and the increase in the number of women entering the workforce.

Business has come to depend on the increase of women in the workforce. However, labor economists predict a skilled labor force shortage in the 1990s while the rate of growth in the labor market between now and the year 2000 is expected to be cut in half. The decline in birth rates after 1960 has dramatically cut the number of workers available to fill jobs, and the competition for skilled, entry level workers has begun. As the pool of young workers shrinks, women will fill the gap and more working mothers will increase the demand for child care.

Social Changes

Today, care of children and the sick and aging, social tasks carried out primarily in the family 150 years ago, are increasingly done in and through organized institutions such as the child care center,

the hospital and health care system, the business enterprise and the school. Employment of women outside the home is one of the most significant social changes in the United States (Oppenheimer; Semyonov). This phenomenon has rapidly included farm women (Bokemeier and Tickamayer). In 1980, 46 percent of farm women were in the labor force, compared to 50 percent of nonfarm women (Scholl). In March, 1988, 65 percent of all women with children under 18 worked outside the home. By the year 2000, 80 percent of women in their prime childbearing years, between 25 and 44, will be in the labor force. One in every four mothers in the work force maintains her own family. Today more than 5.3 million single mothers are working.

Nuclear Family No Longer Typical

Despite these facts, we are reluctant as a nation to change our outdated paradigm of the family. The paradigm of the nuclear family with breadwinning father, homemaker mother and two children continues to permeate our culture and influence family policy makers. This paradigm is out of date for both urban and rural families.

New Realities for Rural Families

Rural families are an important clientele group for most of us. What is the new reality for this segment of society? The most complete and contemporary view of farm families and the effects of external employment on farm family economic productivity and family functioning is found in the September, 1988, issue of the *Home Economics Research Journal* (Wozniak and Scholl). This special issue is the product of a collaborative research project involving a seven-state group of family scientists and family economists established in 1983 under the Regional Research Program of the United States Department of Agriculture as a project of the Southeastern Region of Agricultural Experiment Stations.

Interest in the effects of employment on farm families propelled this collaborative effort along with the realization that the work/family relationship among urban families had received much attention in the literature with little similar information concerning farm families being available. I commend this entire issue for your reading if you wish a complete picture of an array of work/family issues impacting farm families. In my short time today I would simply like to present some bullets of information drawn from this issue that will serve our purpose as we view the new realities for farm families.

- As is the case with their nonfarm counterparts, the percentage of farm women in the labor force has been increasing. From 1960 to 1970, 89 percent of the employment growth in rural com-

munities can be attributed to women entering the labor force (Brown and O'Leary).

- By 1980, 46 percent of farm women were in the labor force, compared to 50 percent of nonfarm women (Scholl).
- Almost three-fourths of these externally employed farm women were participating in a triad of roles: (a) employee working off farm; (b) farmer, doing at least one farm task regularly; and (c) homemaker performing household and family tasks (Haney; Scholl).
- Off-farm employment, especially for women with small children, may bring dramatic changes to the farm family system (Jones-Webb and Nickols).
- A 1980 National Farm Women Survey concluded that women's off-farm employment depends on educational credentials and their family responsibilities (Rosenfeld).
- The wife's level of occupation and her earning potential appear to influence the couple's ability to provide additional income (Wozniak and Scholl).
- Women with high educational levels were more likely to work off farm and to be employed in the service industry or the professions (Bokemier, Sachs and Keith).
- Farm women's role-related stress has been found to be one of the more prevalent stress experiences (Berkowitz and Perkins).
- Despite assumptions that rural people naturally rally to the support of those needing help, there is scant evidence to support the assertion that rural families are any more advantaged in their ability to cope with stress than urban families (Coward and Jackson).

The increasing participation of farm women in off-farm work has numerous extension and policy ramifications. While I won't go into the extension implications I strongly urge all specialists to review this entire special issue and discuss the programming implications from this extensive research base.

Quality of Rural Schooling

Clearly an important policy concern for rural development is the quality of rural schooling. Because schooling enhances earning ability, as well as the ability to cope with change and stress, farm children must receive high quality instruction. Many of our rural schools are not up to national standards. Given the renewed interest in education nationwide, the opportunity for improvement is present for many states.

Rural Child Care

Another policy issue needing attention is child care. We do not know generally the extent of this problem for farm families. How

adequate are child care facilities in rural areas? Is the lack of quality child care a constraint to farm women working off farm?

Rural Nonfarm Employment

With the increasing trend for farm families to depend upon off-farm earnings, policies affecting rural nonfarm employment opportunities become more important. Rural development programs and policies must address labor needs, business taxes and utilities as each of these affect industrial development and job creation.

Child Care

Child care has emerged as a growing and urgent issue for working parents and policy makers in both the public and private sector. As historians look back on the decades of the 60s, 70s and 80s the most noticeable transformation will be the percentage of married women with children under 6 years of age working outside the home. This percentage increased from 12 percent in 1950 to 57 percent in 1987. Equally dramatic will be the increase of mothers of children under 2 years of age at work in the labor force and the number of single parent households. Economic necessity is the driving force in the numbers of women in the workforce. Child care is no longer a welfare issue or a women's issue, nor is it a luxury; it is an economic necessity and a critical element in strategies to increase the labor force and encourage economic growth. Women who are working from 8 to 5 cannot care for dependent children in the home. This change in reality means child care cannot be handled in the paradigm of the past.

Finally, the issue of quality child care has intersected with the economic realities of our present and future labor force. Early childhood development professionals report that a child's first five years are critical in laying an educational base. If we can improve the quality of care, education and training children receive, we can produce a better educated and more capable workforce for the future.

A Leading Problem

In February, 1989, twenty-one national magazines surveyed families using an instrument originated by the Child Care Action Campaign (Greer). It focused primarily on care for the children of working parents and on the issue of family leave to care for new infants and seriously ill children or parents.

When asked if family issues should be a top priority for the president and Congress, 75 percent of the respondents said yes, 24 percent said no. When asked if the federal government pays enough attention to child care and other family concerns 81 percent of the respondents said no, 19 percent said yes.

The three most critical child care concerns identified by respondents were quality of care, safety and cost. A survey of 278 mayors and city managers for the National League of Cities found that the lack of day care centers is the leading problem for families with young children (Bowman).

This demand for child care will continue to increase as the number of women entering the workforce climbs. However, child care choices remain limited for America's working families. The supply is limited, the cost is high, access is difficult and quality is an increasing concern.

Limited Availability

The availability of affordable child care in the United States has become a distribution problem. Severe access problems are the direct result of lack of coordination and involvement by state and federal agencies. The United States Department of Labor reports that nearly half of the children of working mothers are in school while their mothers are away from home. The remaining children are cared for in their home or another home, by an individual or in a licensed day care center (National Commission on Working Women, pp. 6-7). The major availability problems appear to be location specific with particular forms of day care not available in particular areas. The lack of licensed child care centers in rural areas is one example.

High Cost

The most expensive form of child care is in-home care by a nanny or housekeeper followed by care in a licensed facility. Care provided by a relative is the lowest in cost. The national average weekly cost for child care for a preschooler is \$50. Infants average \$72 per week per child. Low income families spend a much larger portion of their income on day care. The affordability of child care is most likely to affect families headed by a female and families who have "at risk" children.

Access Problems

Child care centers and homes tend to be concentrated in urban-suburban locations. For many families, particularly lower income families, transportation from the home to the day care center may be a problem. Access problems may also occur for families when the parents work different shifts. If there is a time period of an hour or less between the time one parent leaves for work and the other parent gets home, children may be left in self-care or with a neighbor since day care operators are often reluctant to sell their slots for such a short time.

Quality Problems

Defining quality child care is difficult. Different parents want different things for their children. They are more likely to define quality as the need for safety; health procedures that diminish the spread of disease; and experienced staff (Fried and O'Reilly). A study conducted by the Massachusetts Office for Children suggests that group size; staff training; staff-child ratios; age appropriate programs; and the "match" between the child's needs and the program selected are the most critical measures of quality (Fried and O'Reilly).

Child Care Options

The child care issue raises fundamental questions about family and government responsibility and what we believe to be best for young children. Given the prediction cited earlier, that in the year 2000, 80 percent of women between the ages of 25 and 44 will be in the work force, it is clear we must force our attention on a new reality and a new paradigm, for this issue is not going away.

The Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forum has identified the day care dilemma as a national issue and proposed three possible options for dealing with it:

Option #1 considers that mothers staying at home is in the best interest of the preschooler and suggests government incentives to help mothers raise preschoolers at home (p. 9). Tottie Ellis, vice president of Eagle Forum, is a proponent of this view and urges parents to delay their wants, realizing a child is more valuable than cars, TV's or other material objects. Ms. Ellis would argue that economic necessity is not a valid driving force for the increase in mothers working outside the home. Rather she believes they are trying to improve their lifestyle and keep up with the Jones'.

Option #2 calls for increased social investments by government but only for children who are at great risk. The expansion of Head Start is also advocated in a recent Ford Foundation Project on Social Welfare and the American Future (Ford Foundation). Should we give additional resources only to disadvantaged families?

Option #3 promotes a broad government role in care of preschoolers, providing all families with young children access to affordable, high-quality child care. A massive infusion of federal and state resources may be required as well as setting high quality standards and establishing the infrastructure to regulate and enforce them.

Additional policy considerations address the issues of day care access, quality, cost and supply:

- Investigate alternative ways of restructuring the states' tax codes and the child care tax credit.

- Evaluate the state Title XX subsidy program to determine the optimal subsidy arrangement and analyze the impact of child care subsidies on employment, AFDC payments and earnings.
- Allow school buses to transport school-aged children and older preschoolers between the school and the day care center during the regular school year.
- Award incentive packages, such as tax credits, to new day care providers.

Option Consequences

Each of these options carry consequences. There are currently more than sixty child care bills being debated in Congress. Focusing on their strengths is particularly difficult given that we have no consistent national family policy. This absence of a family perspective in policy making and program evaluation too often results in policies and programs with negative effects on family life. The United States is currently the only developed country that has no national child care policy.

Recognizing this dilemma, the Family Criteria Task Force, a coalition composed of the American Home Economics Association, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Family Service America and the National Council on Family Relations, proposed six key principles as family criteria to guide policy analysis and program evaluation. Under each of the six principles a list of basic family impact questions are raised to help decide the extent to which each family criterion is met. The use of these six principles and related family impact questions can significantly assist us as public policy educators working with clientele on family policy issues such as child care. Time does not allow a full discussion of each of the six principles but let me give one example. Principle #4 - Family Partnership and Empowerment:

Policies and programs should treat all families with trust and respect as partners when providing education, health and social services to a family member and should offer a range of levels of involvement depending on the family's wishes and situation. Families need to be empowered by providing them with information and a maximum degree of choice and decision making.

Eight family impact questions assist clientele and policy makers determine if the principle is being met. For example: Do the written materials about the policy or program state that families are partners in the service or do they tend to marginalize or limit family involvement? In what specific ways does the policy or program seek to involve participating families in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the service or program? Working through all six principles can significantly aid clientele in evaluating the proposed policy or program. Given no national family or child care policy this basic list of family impact questions will serve to guide policy analysis.

Conclusions

In summary, I have attempted to challenge us as policy educators to assist our clientele in viewing the new realities of our world, especially the new realities for families. We have examined the issue of child care, its history, impact upon the labor force of the future and policy options for dealing with the issue. However, we have only scratched the surface and only dealt with one issue. There are many challenges ahead for families and, therefore, for policy educators working together to improve the lives of individuals and families.

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